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Testimony Re: House Bill 7484 and Budget Article 12, Section 7– Health Care for Children

House Finance Committee

March 3, 2022

Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its strong support for House Bill 7484 and the provision in Section 7 of Article 12 which would reestablish Rhode Island’s commitment to provide health insurance to low-income children who are residents of the state, regardless of immigration status.

On behalf of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT I would like to thank Representative David Morales for his leadership in sponsoring the bill and thank the Governor for including it in his FY23 Budget. We would also like to thank the cosponsors of this bill, Representatives Williams, Felix, Alzate, Giraldo, Kazarian, Casimiro, Kislak, Diaz, and Hull. Our support for this legislation reiterates our organization’s strong commitment to address the needs of children and families in Rhode Island with a particular focus on closing racial and ethnic disparities. This bill also has the support of and is a campaign priority of Right from the Start, a legislative and budget campaign to advance state policies for young children and their families. It is led by 8 organizations and many champions.

History of Health Care Coverage for All Children:

Rhode Island covered all low-income children regardless of immigration status for almost 10 years in the late 1990s and early 2000s. It is time to restore this important policy.

The U.S. Supreme court in Plyer vs. Doe (1982), ruled that all children, including undocumented children, have a right to a public Pre-K–12 education. It is critically important that all children who are attending school have access to primary, preventive healthcare, including undocumented children, so they are healthy and ready to learn.

Importance of health insurance coverage for children:

Children who have health insurance coverage are healthier and have fewer preventable hospitalizations than those who are uninsured. Children who are insured through Medicaid/RIte Care are more likely to receive primary and preventative medical and dental care, have access to specialists, and have fewer unmet health needs than uninsured children. Evidence also shows that Medicaid/RIte Care has reduced racial/ethnic disparities in access and utilization, improved educational outcomes, and shielded children from poverty.

It's time to finish the job and Cover All Kids

In 2019, 98.1% of Rhode Island children had health insurance coverage. Only about 4,000 Rhode Island children were uninsured, and 3,000 of these children were income eligible for RItE Care. To achieve our goal of covering all kids, we must restore access to RItE Care health insurance for income-eligible children who are undocumented immigrants.

All children need access to health care that supports their healthy growth and development and promotes school success. It is far more cost effective to provide access to primary, preventive care to undocumented children than paying the far higher cost when a health condition that could have been prevented or treated early escalates to an emergency requiring emergency room care that the state pays for.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT thanks the General Assembly for their dedication to improving child health in the state of Rhode Island and urges you to pass this bill.

